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21 February 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Reflections on CIA "Conscience"

1. From the beginning of our commitment as the professional covert action arm of the U. S. Government in December 1947 (NSC 4-A), this agency has recognized its tremendous responsibility. While authority for approval of our activities initially rested within, we were increasingly uncomfortable with this mandate and we therefore welcomed and even recommended that such authority be shared with other key foreign affairs elements of the executive branch (State, Defense and the White House Senior Staff). From the beginning we realized that the financial freedom represented by our unvouchered funds was a special trust, and we thus initiated a review and control system (which we continue to polish) enabling us to apply both substantive and financial soul-searching evaluations of our action programs. The evolution of this review process is an example of our continuing effort to ensure that our stewardship--from a policy as well as a budgetary point of view--was as effective as we could make it. If we had wanted to proceed in a strictly bureaucratic (safe but not inventive) fashion, we would have stifled the one key facet of our organizational personality--our ability to pinpoint potential problem areas for U. S. foreign policy, present the facts, and once these were recognized consider what role--if any--we could assign to our covert action instrumentalities. Where we did not have a capability, we learned how to move quickly to acquire it if so directed.

2. Thus, we developed a unique capability to plan just what could be done covertly to head off potentially unacceptable foreign developments, or, when asked, to nudge a wavering group or country into a path more in line with U. S. foreign policy objectives. Given the underlying objective of U. S. foreign policy--self survival, we were required and even on occasion volunteered to do what was needed, even when most objective observers said that it was almost impossible (i.e., in the Congo, Laos, etc.). More than not we succeeded.

3. While in the early days we may have occasionally deserved the label of "the department of dirty tricks", we soon gained the reputation--within the inner circle of the executive branch--of a highminded, often

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embarrassingly frank and open, cadre of professional civilians who had the ability to get the job done quickly and quietly. Our diversity, combined with our managerial and substantive ability, plus our crispness, kept us involved in a staggering variety of new and most times extremely sensitive assign-

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identify with those who want to ensure that their countries remain free from Communism's subversive influence or control. We did not need to hold the flag. We somehow found that minimum of mutuality of interest in events abroad which we could develop professionally, in an honest and intellectual fashion, to the point where we could, on specific and crucial occasions, ask and receive.

4. Throughout, we remained keenly conscious of our mandate--general and specific--and went to extreme lengths to ensure that what we were doing had the approval of the executive branch. On this the record is clear. We may now realize that while higher authority and key foreign policy advisors approved our actions in advance, those actions--rightly or wrongly--may have gotten out of step with a certain portion of the American public. But since we cannot be faulted on our policy approval procedures, we can accept our present predicament simply as part of our professional responsibilities, recognizing that one of our reasons for existence is to provide the plausible denial. But among those for whom we work, there can be no misunderstanding; we did not act unilaterally and we can prove it. For all the others in our nation whom we serve, only history can defend us.

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